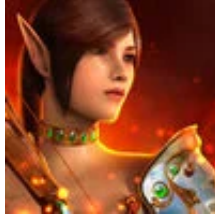


# RPG Reload Developer Spotlight 004 – Raj Dhillon from WaveLight Games

[January 19, 2017](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



It's time for the next installment in our monthly series of articles looking at the developers and publishers behind some of our favorite games. The aim here is for you readers to get a sense of the person, so the tone is more conversational than we usually use in interviews here at TouchArcade. It's also not necessarily about the games themselves, either. Basically, we'll kick off and see where the conversation takes us. This month, we're speaking to Raj Dhillon of WaveLight Games, the developer behind the *Demon's Rise* series of SRPGs, which consists of *Demon's Rise* ([\\$7.99](#)) and relatively recent release *Demon's Rise 2* ([\\$7.99](#)).

For this transcript, my words will be bolded, while Raj's will be in regular text. And now, let's get to the interview.

## ***Introductions and Pizza Talk***

**So, for any of our readers who don't know you, can you let them know who you are, what you're about, and your favorite pizza toppings?**

My name is Raj Dhillon and I'm pretty much now the one man behind WaveLight Games. We used to be a few other people, mostly contractors, who basically got me off the ground in terms of some of the early development. Then I just sort of carried that forward, making games out of the work that was done with those contractors. Our focus is on strategy

games. My background is that I used to be really into tabletop war games like *Warhammer* and the more grown-up versions of those kinds of tabletop games. What I'm trying to do is bring that kind of gameplay into, you know, the handheld/tablet/mobile phone platforms. Basically, kind of like *Slitherine*, though hopefully I'm doing better than them in terms of things like nicer graphics and the like.

**Okay. Favorite pizza toppings, though! You didn't answer, you're being evasive!**

Sorry! Yeah, I think my favorite is probably chicken, sun-dried tomato, and onions. That's just a killer combination.

**That's classy!**

Yeah, I'm trying to incorporate bacon into it, though, because everything else in the world is improved by bacon, you know?

**You have to be careful, though. Bacon can overpower.**

That's true. I just love bacon so much, I really want to fit it in there somewhere. Maybe put it into the crust?

**See, that's a good idea.**

Maybe cheese and bacon in the crust somehow?

**That would subtly enhance the flavor without overpowering it. And if it does overpower, worse comes to worse, you've just got something that tastes like bacon, and that's not sad.**

No, that's not bad at all.

***On the Origins of WaveLight Games***

**Alright, so I guess I want to know how you got into the whole making games thing? How did WaveLight start?**

Umm, literally about four or five years ago, one of my friends gave me a book on game development in... what was the language? I can't recall the name, but it was a scripting language focused on games. Anyway, he gave me that book, I read it, and I found it really interesting, so I started dabbling in it. My first attempt was to make a game like *Magic: The Gathering*, but it turned out to be quite complicated, surprisingly enough. Then, I ended up making a twin-stick shooting game which was briefly on the App Store, for about six months.

**Oh, wow!**

Yeah, it was a funny game, actually. It involved the player controlling two scantily-dressed young ladies who were very well-endowed, fighting against hordes and hordes of demons and monsters. It was kind of rough, but it honestly wasn't bad for a first attempt.

**Okay, what was the name of that game?**

The game was called *Gun Frenzy*. Google it, you'll find pictures of it I'm sure. I keep thinking I should re-do it, like properly, and re-release it, but I just never get around to do it. Part of me does like twin-stick shooters so I'm thinking after... the next few games are definitely going to be turn-based games, but maybe after that I might do a proper twin-stick shooter. Aim for something the quality of, like, *Feral Fury*, or something like that. You know, something of that level.

**There's definitely an audience for that genre on iOS, so it's a pretty good call.**

Just something different, you know? It's funny, it's a stupid game, it's really dumb, but you know, it's a fun one.

## Gun Frenzy Gameplay Teaser

**I guess there's only so many huge turn-based strategy games you can do in a row, right?**

Yeah, exactly. I'm hoping to release three this year, all based on top of the *Demon's Rise* code. I want to do another *Demon's Rise* game, *Strike Team*, which is like the futuristic version of *Demon's Rise*, and I just started, last week actually, a giant armada spaceship-style game.

**Whoa, that's cool!**

Kind of like *Battlefleet: Gothic*, where you can control a whole fleet of massive battleships, and wings of fighters, and you're fighting another opposing spaceship fleet, and stuff like that. I only did one level, as kind of a proof of concept, but it looks pretty good.

**I like the idea! You're finding good variety.**

I just need to find a name for it. Every single name I come up with, I've tried like 30, are all in use. Everything I could come up with off the top of my head!

**That's a challenge when you're delving into fantasy and sci-fi. There are just so many games that it's hard to find a name that doesn't sound silly but also hasn't been used.**

Yeah. I'm actually surprised *Strike Team* wasn't taken. There was *Call of Duty: Strike Team*, but...

**There's probably a fair few games that use that as a subtitle, but not as the full title, so you should be okay. I'm surprised *Demon's Rise* wasn't taken.**

That is true. I went through so many names for that, too. It's a very frustrating thing, you're typing up every single possible combination and searching Google.

**Flipping the table over, "I can't believe *Final Fantasy's* been taken!" (laughs)**

The thing is, I don't really play a lot of games anymore, so I'm not up to date with what game names have been used.



**There are so many games coming out now, I think it's impossible to even be apprised of all of them.**

Sometimes, I don't envy your job.

**Well, as Eli puts it, every week we drink from the fire hose.**

At least on the positive side, from what I've seen in the App Store, a whole bunch of games are in Mandarin now, so I'm not sure if you guys even need to cover those?

**Sometimes they do English versions, and in that case, yeah. There was actually one game, completely in Mandarin, that I was going to do for the RPG Reload, but I thought that it was probably too niche even for my audience, so I gave up.**

Your audience! (laughing)

**It's a really cool game, though. I wish I could cover it, because it's a port of a classic Chinese PC RPG, and it's nice. Very good sprite work on it.**

Yeah, the artwork on a lot of those games is... I'm envious of it. I actually finally started hiring a professional artist to redo a bunch of the artwork, and do promotional art, and that stuff is expensive. Hopefully, I'll get that guy doing something nice and refresh the art on the existing games, and launch the new ones with some nice art.

### ***On Putting Together the Games***

**I think one thing that works in your favor is that there are a lot of games in that genre on iOS, but most of them kind of go for a pretty simple look. It's kind of strange to me, but I guess it's a characteristic of the modern era that a game that is coming from a team of one, or two, or three or four, can be one of the best-looking games in the genre on the platform. That's kind of cool to me.**

The tools available to me, to developers now, are just insane. What I'm finding is that with the vast majority of people, they don't really use the tools well. They either take a mish-mash of 3D characters of different styles and throw them together in a game without optimizing them so they run really badly, or they avoid them completely and just go with 2D hand-drawn art. Maybe this will change over the years, but there aren't many people that take all those tools and all the 3D characters that these artists license out and take the time to optimize them, to make them run well on mobile and look cohesive together.

**Yeah.**

What I do is, I have a few 3D artists that I work closely with and I license the work that they produce, to use in my games. They produce stuff that is really aimed at desktop PCs, so I just spend hours and hours taking all of their artistic creations and butchering them with a rusty knife to get them to run on an iPhone's CPU.





What I find more often than not is that the developers that are good with 3D graphics have some issues making a good game out of it. I feel that sometimes they're maybe reaching too far? You've had a lot of people in our forums asking you to do something on a bigger scale than *Demon's Rise*, and I think down that road lay disaster for smaller developers.

Yeah, absolutely. I just can't do it because once you introduce scope creep... I've learned, with the first *Demon's Rise* game, and then the second one, I've gotten way better reception from the second game. The second game is a better game, even though it has half the characters. Like, it launched with one-third of the playable characters of the first game. It launched with maybe a little bit more than half the number of levels and enemies that the first one had. Each of those 15 characters were better designed than the 30



in *Demon's Rise 1*. Sometimes, a small scope can be your friend.

**Right. More is not always better.**

No, exactly. I'm learning that. I've learned that now. As I'm working on *Strike Team* and the next *Demon's Rise*, I'm continually reminding myself of that. Just stick to this many levels, and make them really good. Make them memorable. As opposed to having a bunch that don't quite stack up.

### ***On Feedback and the Response to Demon's Rise 2***

**How has the response been to the second game compared to the first one? Because I think it's a better game too, but what has the feedback been like, and how have the sales been in compared to the first one?**

The sales have been good. I mean, they've been quite a lot better than *Demon's Rise*. The truth is, because I do this part-time, I don't need... well, my day job pays me a stupid amount of money. I don't really need to do it for the money, you know? So, since November 10th, the game has given me about... just under \$20,000?

**Oh, that's not bad!**

It's great for a guy who doesn't need money! So I'm happy. *Demon's Rise 1*, in the first year, made about... I'd guess around \$10,000? Not a whole hell of a lot, to be honest. It made three or four thousand in the first few months, and then after that it was just maybe \$400 per month, something like that.



**I guess maybe what we're seeing here is that you've kind of established a base with the first game that is growing now.**

Yes, exactly. That's really my goal. I have that luxury that I don't need game development to pay my mortgage, so I can afford to take it slow and steady, learn from each experience. I think within five years, it'll make decent money. But I'm in no rush. I just want to make good games. But you know, a new Ferrari in the garage would be okay, too. (laughs)

**It wouldn't be a sad thing! How's the player feedback been on the second game?**

Um, good. It's been overall really good. I think people responded to the fact that this game has a story that's actually somewhat interesting as opposed to the first game. The level design and character design, players have

responded well to overall. You know, there is clearly more thought put into the design of the game. I've had a few people who have come back saying they really don't enjoy playing as the bad guys. They want their knight in shining armor, their elf with a bow, the dwarf cleric. Which is fair.

**Makes sense.**

I had one person who got really upset with me, saying that *Demon's Rise 1* is their favorite game and this game has half the content, and is a rip-off. I guess I could see that, if you just bought *Demon's Rise 1* last week, and you compared it, I could see it. *Demon's Rise 2* would feel like a step down in a way. But that's only because I've been updating *Demon's Rise 1* with all that extra stuff. Overall, it's been pretty good. The reception's been pretty good. I think the next game that I'm working on in that franchise is going back to playing as the good guys.

**So, following up on that mention of adding so much to the first game. Now, I think you've been one of the more prolific updaters when it comes to your games.**

I'll take that as a huge credit, but really it just means I released the first game six months too early, without testing.

**Do you find that that additional investment that you've put in has been worth it in some way, not necessarily financial?**

Absolutely. It's gotten me a good reputation among the community, it's helped me get noticed a little by Apple. They finally featured *Demon's Rise 2* after one of my updates, so somebody at the App Store knows I exist, which is great. And you know, to be honest, spending that extra year getting feedback from players on *Demon's Rise 1* and fixing it is what made *Demon's Rise 2* launch as well as it did. If I had just worked in isolation on it, without listening to any feedback from actual players and fixing the game, I would have missed out on a lot of stuff. A lot of really good feedback that never



even occurred to me.



**Yeah. *Demon's Rise 2* was able to be as good as it was at launch because of all of the extra updates and feedback, that continual process of refining the first game. That allowed you to come out of the gates with a stronger second game.**

Yes, and a good thing is that I was a little bit clever in terms of the programming side. The two games share the same code base, so if I make a change to the code in one, it automatically applies to the other. The only risk is that sometimes when I make an update for *Demon's Rise 2*, that I don't remember to change the icon from *Demon's Rise 1* back to the one for the second game. I might make that mistake down the road somewhere.

**I have to ask. How did you come up with some of the wild character designs, especially in the first game? You had a walking cannon, where did that come from?**

Honestly, I'd love to say that I'm some kind of really creative type, but I mostly just browsed the 3D characters that artists created, that they license

out. I see a good character that I like, and if it fits the theme from an appearance perspective, then I just kind of throw it in. That's where some of that craziness comes from. Just this morning, one of the artists that I work really closely with, he produced this really cool looking fairy that I just have to put in my next game. So the next *Demon's Rise* game is going to have a fairy as one of the playable characters.

**There you go, everyone. You got some insider info. That, and the potential space battle game. We've got two juicy nuggets already.**

Maybe in about a month or so, I'll start an "upcoming" thread on that one. Because that game's proof of concept went really well. I think it'll take me much less effort to produce that space game than a typical *Demon's Rise* game. What I'm finding is that spaceships don't have complex animations, and you have the emptiness of space as opposed to tight corridors, elaborate dungeons, or that kind of stuff.

**I would guess that going to projectile attacks, which spaceships are primarily going to be using, that would avoid a lot of headaches with collision detection and all that too, right?**

Yeah, absolutely. That one just looks great. The one level I made just looks good. I've played it maybe dozens of times, just controlling these big spaceships and launching huge energy weapons, missiles, and so on. I think people will enjoy it.

### ***On Sources of Inspiration and Evil Friends***

**So, you mentioned that you come from a tabletop wargaming background. Are there any video games that play into your design philosophy or anything like that?**

To some extent. Definitely the first *XCOM*, and I mean the original. When I

was in university, my best friend introduced me to that game right during exam season...

## What a jerk! (laughing)

I know! Literally, I kid you not, I played it all night the day he gave it to me, and many more hours after that. So, definitely the original *XCOM* is a huge influence, I absolutely love that game. Other than that, I played mostly PC games, things like the *Baldur's Gate*, Bioware, RPGs, and *Planescape Torment*, which is probably my favorite game of all time next to *XCOM*. I was playing a lot of *Fallout* and *Skyrim* until my kids happened, but then I didn't really have time to play video games anymore. That was the last thing. I still have hopes of one day buying a new gaming PC and just, you know, playing games all day.



**It's one of those far-off dreams. I have a similar one.**

Maybe in the retirement home, I'll be the guy with the kick-ass gaming PC.

**I've got something like a hundred games on Good Old Games that I**



**think, yep, one day, one day I'm going to be playing those. One day, I'm going to run through those Gold Box games again, yep.**

Yeah, exactly. (laughs) So now, I just live vicariously through watching videos of people on Mobcrush like yourself. I wish I could play that game, but at least I can watch someone else do it.

**There you go! I think that's kind of interesting, though, because I think a lot of players come to your games with more experience from the console strategy RPG end of things. I think a lot of people that are coming off of *Final Fantasy Tactics*, or *Fire Emblem*, are playing your games. We had one person who commented way after the review was posted, and they were just furious because they kept missing all the time. All I could think was that they were not familiar with the whole wargaming background.**

I've actually never played *Final Fantasy Tactics* or *Fire Emblem*. I'm sure they're great games, but I have no concept of them.

**I want to say that *Fire Emblem* has a very different tempo from what you're doing. *Final Fantasy Tactics* kind of has the same sense of building a group over a course of battles, building them up and expanding their capabilities. That's kind of a shared element between your game and *Tactics*. But of course, that's got more of a story focus, and coming from the console side, there's less missing, more inflated HP counts, stuff like that.**

I get regular feedback from people wondering why they miss, and I just think, you're controlling a character that has a sword and a shield, and he swings that sword, and the person he's swinging at doesn't want to get hit. That leads to things like trying to avoid it, and blocking with their shield, and parrying, and so forth. This is what I'm trying to represent. So yes, you don't always hit all the time.



**I like at least that you don't put the deceitful percentages up like in *XCOM*. That's something.**

The percentages are accurate! It's just hard. The thing is that I'm going from a really old school, role-playing, turn-based strategy type-stuff. In *Demon's Rise* it's like, you're fighting a bunch of goblins. Most of the time, you're going to hack your way through, but there is a chance that one of them hits you. And there's a chance that it does a crap-load of damage, yeah? Sometimes that happens, and you're in there wailing away, and some goblin with a little stick lands a critical hit and you lose your favorite character. It kind of shocks a lot of people, but that's reality.

**This is true.**

I'm kind of a history person, that's the other side of my personality. Did you

know that the last King of Wales was killed by an unnamed English spearman?

## **Really?**

Yep, the last King of Wales. That's life. You know, he was probably the equivalent of a level 50 dude with super-duper armor, a magic sword, and everything, but sometimes a pointy stick can still kill you. It happens.

**It's interesting when you have games that acknowledge that. I remember a fighting game from Square Enix called *Bushido Blade*, and one of the conceits of *Bushido Blade* was that it was realistic. So if you got cut in a certain place, one shot could kill you. I think that's interesting, but I think that players aren't really used to that.**

## ***On Future Plans, Past Occurrences, and Current Realities***

**I'm just sitting here thinking about it, though, and I can't think of any genre that more comfortably crosses the divide between PC and console than strategy/simulation games. I feel like the RPGs from computers and consoles are pretty far apart from each other, but strategy has enough overlap that you're going to end up with both player bases jumping in on a game. That can probably lead to some interesting feedback.**

Yeah. I'm going to try to start releasing on Steam, and Good Old Games, if they will take me. I want to get onto PC. Part of me knows that there will be a lot of people who like these kinds of games, but then there will also be a lot of people who will be expecting way better graphics, or way better something.

**My advice is that if you're going to launch on PC, make sure it's a game that's not from mobile. Even if you plan on putting it on mobile, launch**



on PC first.

That ship has sailed for *Demon's Rise*, but I know what you mean. It just feels weird, though. My first inclination is to go mobile first, even though I know it's not the right decision.

**Economically, probably not. But it sounds like you're doing okay, though.**

Yes, I'm one of those rare individuals who makes more money than I should, and I don't really spend it. I'm also married to a mythical unicorn who also does the same, she doesn't spend much either.



So you mentioned you're into history. I think that gives us a good excuse. Tell us about your background. Where are you from? They can't

**see this in the text, but you've got a nice, crisp British accent.**

Yep. I was born in India, in the Northwest part of India called Punjab. A little bit of trivia, that was where, when the British invaded India, that was the last area they invaded. They were so impressed by how good we were at fighting that they basically used us to conquer the rest of the world. Well, most of the East, anyway. But anyway, I'm from Punjab. When I was about four years old, I moved to the U.K., and I lived there for about ten years. I was in London, mostly. Then I came to Canada. I just kept the accent because I found it impresses women and makes me sound smart. (laughs) Unfortunately, my wife couldn't tell the difference, but it impresses other women. Which I suppose doesn't help me much these days.

**Yeah, I don't know if you want that feature anymore, right? So what's your educational background, if you don't mind?**

I'm an engineer, so by education I'm a computer engineer. That's where the programming skills come from. But my day job is in finance, which is odd. So I don't use any programming or engineering skills in my day job. I use game development as an outlet for that side of things. The only thing that is relevant in my day job from my education is that I work with a whole team of developers from India, and whenever they try to confuse me with techno-babble, it doesn't work very well.

**That's useful! So when you're not working your day job, and you're not working on games, what do you do?**

I have two kids, which are both black holes for time and space, so they take up every waking minute. Then, I'm married too, so on occasion, whatever few microseconds I have left, my wife takes.

**Around how old are your kids?**

Oh. One of them is five, and one of them is two and a half.

**Oh, jeez. (laughing) And I'm asking you about free time, you don't have any!**

As I mentioned, I'm into table top wargaming, so I have a basement full of miniatures, wargaming miniatures. I don't have time to paint them nowadays, but before I had kids and started game development, I was quite good at painting them. I won a couple of competitions around painting. So I have a little bit of an artistic side to me, but that's probably died from neglect. It's been six years or so.

**Ah, I'm sure you'll be able to get back to it one day.**

Yeah, exactly. Just like I'm going to finish all of those games that I want to play!

**One day.**

One day, I'll play *Fallout 4*.

**You will!**

That's my goal in life, is to play that game, and whatever new game comes from *Elder Scrolls* after *Skyrim*. I will play that game. One day.



## Demon's Rise 2 App Preview

**Well, there you go. I don't want to take up too much more of your time, so I guess we'll bring things to a close now. If you've got anything you want to do, feel free. This is your moment.**

I feel kind of bad, because I feel like I always inadvertently plug my games during the Mobcrush sessions, and I'm desperately trying not to. I'm pretty new at this advertising thing. I just want to thank the TouchArcade community, because they have seriously been amazing. I'm just going to keep flooding the forums with more stuff about the upcoming games, and this will be a busy year, so I hope everyone is looking forward to it.

**Excellent. Well, I don't think anyone will be upset with that. Flood away, sir.**

I hope so.

**Well Raj, thanks for giving us your time today, and I'm sure we'll be**

**talking to you again soon enough.**

Thanks again to Raj for agreeing to this interview and filling us in on his past, present, and future. Thanks also to you, kind readers, for supporting this idea. Remember, features like this one are only possible thanks to your generous support of [the TouchArcade Patreon](#). If you enjoy these interviews, please consider subscribing to the Patreon to help us keep delivering them. If you have any developers you're interested in hearing from, or if you are a developer interested in taking part in one of these interviews, please let me know in the comments below or by tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#). As for me, I'll be back next week with another article.

**Next Week's Reload:** *The Curious Cases of F2P Going Premium in Japan*